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The Effects of Cause Related Product Consumption on Status Inference by Perceived Altruism and Moral Identity Symbolism

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Abstract

The Effects of Cause-related Product Consumption on Status Inference by Perceived Altruism and Moral Identity Symbolization

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This study examines cause-related product consumption as a costly signal that can imply positive status to others. While existing research typically investigates status consumption for luxury products, this study proposes that cause-related products have become a status symbol. Two studies demonstrate that people confer higher status to cause-related product consumption rather than general product consumption. These positive inferences are driven by perceived altruism and moderated by individual differences in moral identity symbolization in the observers.

Experiment 1 shows that when people observe the consumption of cause-related products, they perceive altruism positively. This has an indirect positive effect on status inference. Further, when the symbolization of moral identity is high rather than low, cause-related products strongly influence the perception of altruism. However, the main effect of cause-related products on status inference was not significant. In the scenario, participants did not have sufficient explanations for the situation, and because only gender and age were controlled, other variables may have played a role. Therefore, Experiment 2 proceeded in the same manner as a method used in a previous study on status inference (Bellezza et al., 2014). In Experiment 2, information was given to the participants in the form of scenarios, and the subject&s occupation, gender, age, and the situation in the scenario were controlled to measure the effect of these factors on status inference.

Experiment 2 shows that the effect of status inference resulting from the consumption

of cause-related goods occurs through perceived altruism and that this effect differs according to moral identity symbolization. The study shows that participants infer a higher status from consuming cause-related products than general products (H1). For consumers using cause-related products, participants infer that the consumer&s level of altruism is high, so the subject&s status inference is elevated. In contrast, general product consumption does not significantly affect status inference through perceived altruism (H2). Further, the greater the participants& moral identity symbolization, the higher their perceived altruism and the higher the status inference in consuming cause-related products. Meanwhile, participants with low moral identity symbolization have no statistical significance in status inference through perceived altruism (H3). Thus, all three hypotheses are supported.

In summary, I demonstrate that cause-related consumption behavior leads to status inference from others. The mechanism that explains this relationship is perceived altruism; individuals perceive the consumption of cause-related products as costly signaling and infer higher status as they perceive more altruism. Further, people with high moral identity symbolization are more likely to infer higher status through increased perceived altruism by cause-product consumption. However, for people with low moral identity symbolization, the difference in product consumption does not affect perceived altruism and status inference.

This research highlights the value of cause-related product consumption and contributes to the literature in several ways. First, this study addresses the acquisition of social status based on prosocial behavior, which has not been discussed in marketing research. Previous studies have argued that social status is acquired through the consumption of luxury goods or prestige brand products, but this study differs in viewing status as being achieved through cause-related consumption, which is prosocial behavior. Second, this study suggests that it is necessary to look at the socio-psychological status, not just socioeconomic status. Prosocial behavior strongly influences the group (socio-psychological advantage), thus influencing status inference. Finally, while various prior studies have focused on monetary donations and participation

in charitable activities for prosocial behavior, this study discusses the consumption of cause-related products.

Key words : Status Inference, Perceived Altruism, Moral Identity Symbolization, Cause-related Products, Corporate Social Responsibility, Competitive Altruism, Costly Signaling

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Chapter 1 Introduction

Section 1 Background and Purpose of Study

1. Background of the study

Defined as a series of marketing activities contributing a portion of profits to social issues, Cause-Related Marketing (CRM) emerged from Corporate Social Responsibility (CSR) as a strategy benefiting companies, consumers, and charities (Varadarajan and Menon, 1988; Jiang et al., 2019). Leading companies like 'Patagonia' and 'Estee Lauder' exemplify CSR, influencing positive societal change and enhancing brand image through contributions and donations.

Consumers, desiring an indirect role in societal betterment through product consumption, seek the warm glow effect associated with ethical companies. As a result, the cause-related product market is growing annually, driven by consumer satisfaction and inner warmth. Notably, CRM has proven effective in shaping positive company and brand images, fostering favorable product attitudes, and promoting high purchase intentions (Ja-Young Choi and Yun-Sik Choi, 2011; Gupta and Pirsch, 2006; Varadarajan and Menon, 1988).

Recent studies recognize cause-related product consumption as a status symbol, expanding beyond luxury goods to include eco-friendly products. Griskevicius et al. (2010) demonstrated consumers actively purchase eco-friendly products in public spaces, showcasing themselves as 'altruists.' Unlike prior studies focusing on charity or luxury goods, this study investigates the status symbolism of cause-related products, particularly eco-friendly items, aiming to understand their impact on status inference.

Furthermore, unlike traditional studies emphasizing prosocial behavior predictors, this study delves into moral identity, specifically, the concept of moral identity symbolism presented by Aquino and Reed (2002). While past research prioritized internalization over symbolization in predicting prosocial behavior, recent studies, such as Winterich et al. (2013), argue that moral identity symbolism moderates prosocial behavior in public domains. Given the focus on inferring status through public cause-related product

consumption, this study aligns with Winterich et al.'s (2013) perspective, concentrating on the symbolism aspect of moral identity among individual observers.

2. Purpose of the Study

This study investigates the impact of cause-related product consumption on perceived altruism and status inference, exploring the role of moral identity symbolism in this process. The objectives are as follows:

1. Examine the influence of cause-related product consumption on status inference, assessing whether others infer consumer status based on such consumption.
2. Investigate the mediating role of perceived altruism in the relationship between cause-related products and status inference.
3. Explore how individual moral identity symbolism interacts with cause-related product consumption to influence perceived altruism.
4. Assess the effect of perceived altruism, influenced by the interaction between moral identity symbolism and cause-related product consumption, on status inference. Specifically, the study aims to determine whether higher moral identity symbolism strengthens the perception of altruism and, consequently, leads to enhanced status inference for the consumer.

Chapter 2 Theoretical Background

Section 1 Cause Related Products and Status Inference

As part of corporate social responsibility efforts, cause-related products serve as a strategy to highlight a company's commitment to social welfare. When these activities are authentic, consumers perceive the company positively, contributing to goodwill (Rim et al., 2016). Prosocial behaviors, driven by a desire for social consciousness and identity expression, lead individuals to associate with brands or companies, establishing an 'altruist' identity (Kim et al., 2001).

Previous studies link the purchase intention of cause-related products to social identity and self-expression, serving as a means of status symbolization (Nabi et al., 2017). Companies aim to enhance corporate value by offering social benefits and meeting consumers' desires for self-expression (Sweeney & Soutar, 2001; Han et al., 2010; Mazzocco et al., 2012). Kalajdzic (2022) connects Social Identity Theory with Corporate Social Responsibility, emphasizing that social identity arises from belonging to a group. This study posits that emotions related to group belonging drive young individuals to purchase socially responsible products, establishing social identity.

Building on the relationship between social belonging and prosocial behavior, Lee and Shrum (2012) suggest that purchasing behavior changes in situations of identity threats, leading to conspicuous consumption or prosocial acts. The perception of corporate social responsibility activities shapes a positive attitude, with cause-related product consumption considered a form of prosocial behavior and a means of expressing social identity, contributing to status display. Past studies, such as those on compensatory consumption, status signaling, and materialist consumption, align with the expectation that cause-related product consumption influences status inference.

H1: Cause-related product consumption is expected to lead to higher status inferences compared to general product consumption.

Section 2 Perceived Altruism and Social Status

1. Cause Related Products and Altruism

Altruism, defined as self-sacrificing behavior for others' well-being, serves as a fitting concept to elucidate prosocial behavior (Blum, 1980; Batson, 1997). Koschate Fischer, Stefan, and Hoyer (2012) linked altruism attributes to attitudes toward cause-related product purchases, asserting a positive attitude and warm glow effect increase intentions to buy. Purchasers of cause-related products are perceived as altruistic, as indicated by Griskevicius et al. (2010), who argue that signaling prosocial behavior, even through costly sacrifices, boosts the likelihood of buying eco-friendly products. Cause-related products, tied to eco-friendly initiatives, act as a signal of altruism. This study assumes consumers inform about their altruism through cause-related product purchases, recognizable by observers.

2. Status

Status, encompassing influence and dominance within a group, extends beyond socio-economic factors to include power, reputation, popularity, and leadership in the sociological context (Anderson et al., 2012; Bai, 2017; Bales et al., 1951; Berger et al., 1980; Levine, Moreland 1990; Rosa et al., 1979). In a specific situational, cultural, and temporal context, social status emerges from interactions, representing a nuanced concept distinct from socioeconomic status or social class (Cashdan 1998; Colby et al. 1983; Tushman and Romanelli 1983).

Existing literature suggests that status assessment involves competence, reflecting expertise and skills, and warmth, emphasizing traits like generosity and altruism (Milinski et al., 2001). Warm-hearted behavior, associated with moral traits, contributes to gaining status, as it signifies qualities worthy of respect across various social classes (Flynn 2003; Frimer et al. 2015; Hardy and Van Vugt 2006; Milinski et al. 2002; Torelli et al. 2014; Willer 2009).

According to Bai (2021), moral characteristics are perceived as a pathway to status, receiving admiration, respect, and recognition of influence over others. Previous research on status and prosocial behaviors, mainly focused on financial donations or volunteer activities, lacks exploration of the status implications of prosocial behavior through the purchase of cause-related products. This study argues that perceived altruism conveyed through cause-related product consumption contributes to status acquisition based on warmth.

3. Altruism and Social Status

In line with the notion that moral characteristics impact social status, recent studies explore altruism as a pathway to status acquisition. Competitive altruism, rooted in a biological framework, posits that individuals invest time and energy in helping others, showcasing prosocial behavior such as charity donations and risking personal safety to save strangers (Hardy and Van Vugt, 2006; Van Vugt et al., 2002; Becker and Eagly, 2004). This behavior, observed beyond the individual level, is seen as a form of competition for status through perceived altruism (Barclay and Willer, 2007; Hawkes, 1993; Roberts, 1998; Van Vugt et al., 2007). Altruism is considered costly signaling, a means to advertise prosociality and gain status (Bird and Smith, 2005).

Competitive altruism suggests that when others observe altruistic behaviors, the actor's reputation is enhanced, contributing to status acquisition within the group. This phenomenon, recognized as competitive altruism (McAndrew, 2002; Smith et al., 2000; Zahavi, 1997), involves the group rewarding altruism with status and privileges for collective benefit. Altruism, indicating an individual's personality trait or quality, positions altruists as potential collaborators and leaders within the group (Moreland and Levine, 1982). Combining insights from previous research on competitive altruism suggests that perceived altruistic behavior commands respect across social classes, facilitating status acquisition.

In the context of this study, cause-related product consumption is posited as costly signaling, providing observers with a perception of altruism. This positively influences the consumer's status evaluation.

H 2: The effect specified in H1 is mediated by perceived altruism.

Section 3 Moral Identity Symbolism

According to Blasi (1984), being a moral person is idealized as being good or moral, depending on one's self-concept, suggesting that moral behavior aligns with the importance of moral characteristics in defining one's identity.

Previous studies have linked moral identity to prosocial behavior, with Aquino and Reed (2002) proposing two dimensions: internalization and symbolization. Those with strong internalization tend to view themselves as moral and engage in moral acts privately, while individuals with strong symbolization desire to express their moral identity publicly, engaging in actions like donations to showcase their moral selves to others (Sachdeva et al., 2009). Those with low symbolization may not feel the need to display their moral identity (Winterich et al., 2013).

In examining moral identity symbolism and cause-related marketing, Demasi and Voegtlin (2022) assert that individuals with high symbolism value information about corporate social responsibility, expressing their moral selves through their actions. This study posits that those with high moral identity symbolism are more sensitive to corporate social responsibility activities, expecting a positive effect on perceived altruism due to cause-related product consumption. The interactive effect of moral identity on perceived altruism is further expected to influence status inference.

H3: In the effect of cause related products consumption on status inference through the perceived altruism, people with high moral identity symbolism will have a stronger effect than those with low moral identity symbolism.

Chapter 3 Empirical Study

Section 1 Hypotheses

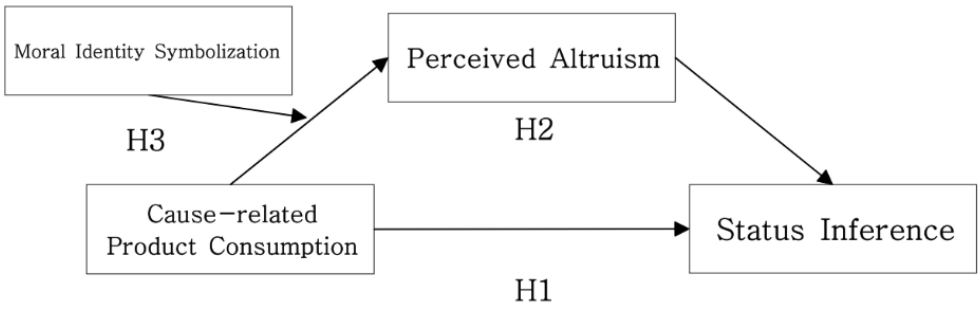
This study not only explored the connection between cause-related product consumption and status inference but also proposed that cause-related product consumption serves as a mechanism for perceived altruism. It emphasized that the impact on inference varies based on the moral identity symbolism of the observer. Observers witnessing cause-related product consumption are likely to perceive high altruism in consumers, associated with valuing others' interests. Given that altruism is perceived as stemming from both economic and psychological capacity, it is anticipated that observers will infer a higher status for such consumers. The study also hypothesized that individuals with a more pronounced inclination to showcase their morality will be more receptive to this costly signaling. Consequently, higher moral identity symbolism, signifying a conspicuous attribute of morality, is expected to amplify the effect of cause-related product consumption on status inference through perceived altruism.

1. The presence or absence of cause-related product consumption will influence status inference. Consumers who engage in cause-related product consumption will have higher inferred status compared to those who do not consume such products.

2 .Perceived altruism will serve as a mediator in the relationship between cause-related product consumption and status inference.

3. The observer's moral identity symbolism (high vs. low) will affect status inference when cause-related products are consumed. Specifically, a strong effect is expected when moral identity symbolism is high, while a weak or absent effect is anticipated when moral identity symbolism is low.

[*Figure 1. Theoretical Framework*]



Section 2 Research design

Two experiments were undertaken to assess the assertions of the study. Initially, these experiments scrutinized the association between cause-related product consumption and status inference while validating the impacts of perceived altruism and moral identity symbolism.

In Experiment 1, manipulation involved cause-related products consumption (condition-cause-related products consumption: vs. no condition-general products consumption), with subsequent inquiries directed at participants regarding their perceived altruism and status inferences. Prior to the manipulation check, the moral identity symbolism item was administered to ensure that self-perception remained unaffected (Bem, 1972).

Experiment 2 followed a parallel sequence to Experiment 1, maintaining control over other variables. The measurement of status inference items was expanded to enhance the generalizability of the hypotheses.

Section 3 Experimental Design and Method

1. Experiment 1

Experiment 1 aimed to determine the impact of cause-related product consumption on status inference. In this experiment, the anticipation was that observers would deduce the consumer's status based on their engagement with cause-related products. This assumption stems from the idea that consuming cause-related products conveys the perception that the individual is actively addressing and solving social issues. Following the competitive altruism theory, consumers of cause-related products are expected to be perceived as altruists with the resources and capacity to contribute to the well-being of others (Hardy and Vugt, 2006). Additionally, the degree of symbolism within the observer's moral identity is presumed to influence the recognition of altruism, thereby affecting status inference. This expectation is grounded in the notion that individuals with high symbolism among moral identities are attuned to socially responsible activities and adept at interpreting signals conveyed by consumers of cause-related products.

Participants and Measurement

Prolific recruited 85 British participants who were randomly assigned to two groups based on scenarios (cause-related products consumption vs. general product consumption). Participants answered 5 questions regarding symbolism among their moral identities. Subsequently, they read a scenario and corporate information about the person in question, responding to 2 questions for manipulation check, 3 questions for perceived altruism, and 3 questions for status inference. Each participant received two pounds as compensation for survey completion. The final analysis included 81 participants (male: 40, female: 40, others: 1; Mage=34.9), excluding 4 participants with missing values among the initial 85 survey participants.

Manipulation Check

Participants were manipulated into reading a scenario about a character. In other words, as an introduction to the person, the condition of being a man in his 40s was given, as a situational explanation, it was assumed that the person attended the conference wearing cause related products vs general products, and the participants saw the person for the first time at the conference. After the participants read the scenario, a supplementary explanation about the brand was presented to them in the form of an article, informing them of the cause related activity of the brand worn. In order to find out whether the cause related products consumption affects status inference, they were randomly assigned to two groups (1=wearing cause related products, 0=wearing general products) according to whether or not they were exposed to manipulation of cause related products, and the manipulation check was conducted by asking participants to answer yes or no to two questions whether they thought the person in question would do charitable activities or be interested in social issues.

Perceived Altruism and Status Inference

Subsequently, upon reading the scenario, participants evaluated the perceived altruism and assigned a high or low status to the individual in question. Specifically, to assess the person's altruistic tendencies, participants used a 7-point Likert scale (1 = strongly disagree, 7 = strongly agree), responding to three items adapted from a study on organizational citizenship behavior related to ethical values in companies by Valentine et al. (2011) (α= .847; M=4.33, SD= 1.30): “this person will try to help first when there is a new employee," “this person will help others,” and “this person will be willing to give of his time for others.

Status inference

The question on status inference consisted of three items. The three questions were questions to infer a person's objective socioeconomic status (SES) - their education, job prestige, and income (Adler et al. 1994; Fiske et al. 2002). That is, it was measured on a 7-point Likert scale (1=strongly disagree, 7=strongly agree) with three items: "Mike

must have been well educated. Mike must have a good job. Mike must have high income." and the result of reliability measurement was α= .818, showing relatively high reliability.

Moral Identity

Participants in the experiment responded to 5 items corresponding to symbolism among the Self Importance of Moral Identity Scale used in the study of Aquino and Reed (2002). Participants were asked to imagine that a person had the following characteristics: Caring, Compassionate, Fair, Friendly, Generous, Helpful, Hardworking, Honest, and Kind. Then, they were asked to vividly imagine how this person would think, feel, and act, and measure how much they agreed with each question on a 7-point Likert Scale (1 = Strongly Disagree, 7 = Strongly Agree). This study measured items on symbolism - 1) I often wear clothes that identify me as having these characteristics. 2) The types of things I do in my spare time, clearly identify me as having these characteristics. 3) The kinds of books and magazines that I read identify me as having these characteristics. 4) The facts that I have these characteristics is communicated to others by my membership in certain organizations. 5) I am actively involved in activities that communicate to others that I have these characteristics - among 10 items on moral identity. It used a 7-point Likert scale (1 = strongly disagree, 7 = strongly agree) and averaged the results for the five symbolism items (α = .826; M = 3.764, SD = 1.130).), the two groups were divided into High and Low based on the bottom 25% and the top 75%.

Experiment result

Manipulation check and result

To check the manipulation, the study had each group answer two questions after reading the scenario, and the two questions were to answer yes or no whether they felt that the person concerned was interested in social issues and whether they thought that the person concerned was doing charity work, and in order to determine the statistical significance of the difference in responses for each of the two items, it conducted a chi-square test, and the results showed a statistically significant difference

(Question 1: χ^2=38.343, p <.001; Question 2: χ^2=26.432, p<.001). Therefore, it can be said that the manipulation check was successful.

Status inference

The study coded cause related products consumption as 1 and general product consumption as 0, and verified the effect on status inference by t-test. When the difference for each question was verified, among the three questions, for the response to education, the main effect was verified with $M_{\text{cause-related products consumption}}$=5.15, $M_{\text{Non Cause-related products consumption}}$=4.73, t(81)=-2.012, p>.05, but the main effect through the mean value of a total of 3 items (Adeler et al. 1994; Fiske et al. 2002) was not significant ($M_{\text{cause-related products consumption}}$=5.12, $M_{\text{Non Cause-related products consumption}}$=4.87, t(81)=-1.340, p> .1). Although the main effect has not been verified, because the higher the level of education, the higher the correlation with income, job, and wealthiness related to socioeconomic status, so the study believed that the experiment was related to status inference, and proceeded to verify the mediation and moderation effects.

Analysis of Mediating Effect of Perceived Altruism

This study conducted Model 4 in Hayes (2013) with 5000 resamples to verify whether perceived altruism mediated the effect of cause related products consumption on status inference, and the results showed that the indirect effect of perceived altruism was significant. (I employed Model 4 in Hayes(2017) with 5,000 resamples). The results showed that the presence or absence of cause related products consumption had an effect on the perceived altruism (B=.6024, t(81)=2.6437, p=.0057), and the perceived altruism had a marginal significant effect on status inference (B = .1887, t(81) = 1.9621, p = 0.0533). Upon closer examination, cause related products consumption evoked stronger perceived altruism than general consumption, and thus status infer higher.

Only indirect effect is significant(B=.1137,SE=.0652 ;95%CI[.0080,.2615] while direct effect is not significant(B=.1333,SE=.1901; 95% CI[-.2451, .5117]). Therefore, it can be concluded full mediation of cause related products consumption effects on status inference by perceived altruism., which supports H2.

[*Table 1*]

Mediation analysis

Outcome Variable: Perceived Altruism						
	B	S.E.	t	p	LLCI	ULCI
Constant	5.0976	.1489	34.2408	.000	4.8012	5.3939
Cause-related products consumption	.6024	.2119	2.8437	.0057	.1808	1.0241
F=8.0865(p<.001),R-squared = .0929						
a. Independent Variable: Cause-related products consumption, Dependent Variable: Perceived Altruism						

Outcome Variable: Status Inference						
	B	S.E.	t	p	LLCI	ULCI
Constant	3.9163	.5064	7.7341	.000	2.9082	4.9245
Cause-related products consumption	.1333	.1901	.7012	.4852	-.2451	.5117
Perceived Altruism	.1887	.0962	1.9621	.0533	-.0028	.3801
F=1.9551(p<.05),R-squared = .0682						
a. Independent Variable: Cause-related products consumption, Perceived Altruism ; Dependent Variable: Status Inference						

Total effect of X on Y					
Effect	S.E.	t	p	LLCI	ULCI
.2470	.1843	1.3401	.1841	-.1199	.6138
Direct effect of X on Y					
Effect	S.E.	t	p	LLCI	ULCI
.1333	.1901	.7012	.4852	-.2451	.5117
Indirect effect(s) of X on Y					
	Effect	Boot SE	Boot LLCI	Boot ULCI	
Perceived Altruism	.1137	.0652	.0080	.2615	

Moderation analysis of moral identity symbolism

In this study, it was expected that symbolism among moral identities would have an interaction with the effect of cause related products consumption on the perceived altruism. First, as a result of verifying the effect of cause related products consumption on the perceived altruism, it was significant with $F(1, 80)=7.413$, $p<.05$. For moral identity symbolism, two groups (high vs. low) were set based on the bottom 25% and the top 75%, and the interaction effect was verified with a significance level of 0.1 by two-way ANOVA analysis.

As a result of the analysis, the difference between the condition and the unconditioned group of cause related products consumption was significant, and the perceived altruism of the conditioned group was higher ($M_{no\ condition} = 5.134$ vs. $M_{condition} = 5.699$; $F(1,50)=3.976$, $p=0.051$), whereas the main effect of moral identity symbolism was not significant ($M_{low}= 5.333$ vs. $M_{high}=5.500$; $F(1,51)=.346$, $p=.559$), and the interaction term of the two variables was found to be marginally significant ($F(1,51)=2.815$, $p<.1$).

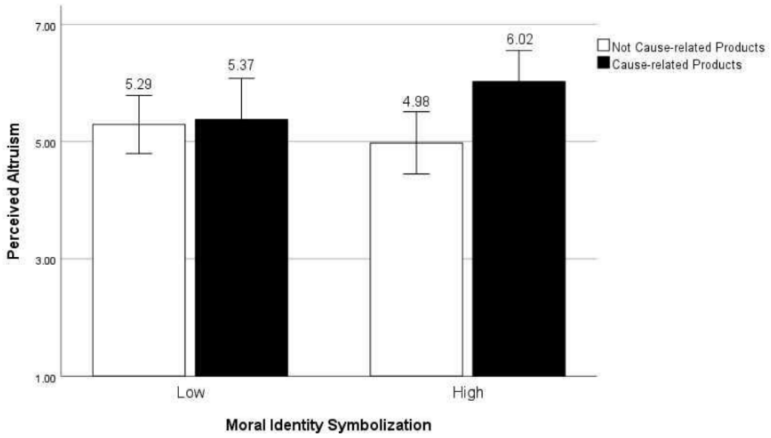
As a result of contrast analysis, participants with high moral identity symbolism ($M_{condition} = 6.024$ vs. $M_{No\ condiiton} = 4.976$; $F(1,51) = 7.893$, $p = .007$) showed high perceived altruism by cause related products, but participants with low moral identity symbolism ($M_{condition} = 5.375$ vs. $M_{No\ condiiton} = 5.292$; $F(1,51) = .038$, $p = .846$) showed no effect on the perceived altruism by the products. In other words, the higher the moral identity symbolism, the stronger the perceived altruism by cause related products consumption becomes, and people with low moral identity symbolism were not affected by the perceived altruism due to general products.

[*Table 2*]

The results of two-way ANOVA for perceived altruism for Cause-related products consumption.

Source	Sum of Squares	df	Mean Square	F	Sig.
Corrected Model	8.141[a]	3	2.714	2.788	.051
Intercept	1421.021	1	1421.021	1459.946	<.001
Consumption	3.872	1	3.872	3.978	.052
Moral Identity Symbolism	.336	1	.336	.346	.559
Consumption * Moral Identity Symbolism	2.815	1	2.815	2.892	.096
Error	46.720	48	.973		
Total	1580.556	52			
Corrected Total	54.861	51			
a. R squared= .148(Adj. R squared=.095)					

[*Figure 2*]



Discussion

Experiment 1 established an indirect effect of perceived altruism as a mediator. The positive influence of observing cause-related product consumption on the perception of altruism subsequently affected status inference. Furthermore, the experiment indicated a more pronounced impact of cause-related products on perceived altruism when moral identity symbolism was high compared to low. However, the main effect of cause-related product consumption on status inference was not statistically significant, preventing the verification of the moderated mediating effect using Model 7 (Hayes, 2017).

During the examination of the mediating effect of perceived altruism, the main effect of cause-related products on status inference lacked significance, and the overall model verification did not reveal a significant moderation effect of moral identity. Upon analysis, it became evident that modifications were needed in the manipulation check. The scenario provided insufficient explanation to participants, and with only gender and age controlled, the results might have been influenced by other variables. Additionally, the articles related to corporate social responsibility activities, presented after reading the scenario, could have impacted the results due to visual information.

Consequently, Experiment 2 followed the methodology of a previous study on status inference (Bellezza et al., 2014). It offered information through a scenario, measured the effect on status inference while controlling for variables like occupation, gender, and age. Furthermore, the experiment expanded to include a larger number of participants to enhance statistical significance.

2. Experiment 2

Experiment 2 has three primary objectives. Firstly, to validate the influence of the main factor, cause-related product consumption, on status inference. Secondly, to reassess the interaction effect of moral identity symbolism and the mediating influence of perceived altruism, as identified in Experiment 1. Thirdly, to substantiate the moderated mediating effect based on this interaction.

Participants and Measurement

Prolific recruited 150 people, of which 146 people, excluding 4 people with missing values, were tested (47 males, 98 females, and 1 other person, Mage=35.8). Participants were rewarded for participating in the experiment by £2 each. This study was conducted with a between-subject design of 2 (products consumption: cause related products consumption, general product consumption) x 2 (moral identity symbolism: high, low).

The experimental procedure proceeded as follows: Participants were randomly assigned to groups based on the presence or absence of cause-related products to measure inter-group differences. Each participant then responded to questions related to their moral identity symbolism. Subsequently, participants read two distinct scenarios depending on the presence or absence of cause-related products and provided answers. While various methods exist to measure social status, this study adopted a similar approach to previous research (Bellezza et al., 2014) for controlling various factors. In the scenario, consistent with Bellezza (2014), character settings were specified to measure status inference, with the occupation set as a professor and the age designated as a male in his 40s.

Manipulation check

The given scenario was as follows. In the case of the experimental group

"A man named Mike is a 45-year-old professor at a university who often goes to work wearing a casual shirt, a cause related product of a company well known for its social responsibility activities. The company concerned with this product uses 1% of its sales revenue to contribute to society. For example, these donations are used to solve various social problems, such as environmental preservation issues, racial discrimination issues, and workers' rights improvement…."

they were asked to read the scenario given as above, and in order to know whether the participants in the experiment evaluated the person who appeared as intended,

"Do you think this person is interested in social and environmental issues?" and *"Do you think this person would be interested in making donations or charity work?"*

they were asked to answer two questions (α=.941) above about their feelings. Each characteristic was evaluated on a Likert scale ranging from 1 (strongly disagree) to 7 (strongly agree).

On the other hand, for an manipulational definition of not using cause related products, it made the occupation, gender, age, etc. of the characters in the scenario the same, but made the description of the company of the clothes they were wearing different. For the description of the company, it explained the recent expansion of the company's product line and manipulated it by making the number of characters similar.

After reading the scenario, they were asked to answer the two manipulation check items mentioned above.

Perceived Altruism and Status Inference

After the manipulation check, the degree of perceived altruism was measured with

three items (α=.881) using the same items as in Experiment 1, followed by three items for status inference (α=.732) (How well respected Mike by students? Mike has high status, Mike is an influential person in his group (Anderson 2012; Cheng et al. 2013). All were measured on a 7-point Likert scale.

Section 3 Experiment Result

Manipulation check

As a result of the analysis, the manipulation was successful($M_{no\ condition}$=3.45 , SD= .91 vs. $M_{condition}$=4.59, SD= .79 ; t(146)= -5.668, p<0.001). Therefore, it can be said that the manipulation of the independent variable was well done.

Cause Related Products Consumption and Status Inference

There was a significant difference in status inference based on cause-related product consumption, with status inference being significantly higher for cause-related product consumption compared to general product consumption (M no condition=4.779, SD=.779 vs. M condition=5.053, SD= .715, t(146)=-2.217, p=0.028). Thus, the impact of cause-related product consumption on status inference was confirmed to be significant.

[*Table 3*]

Source	Cause - related Products Consumption				t	p
	Condition(N=75)		No Condition(N=71)			
	Mean	intercept	Mean	Intercept		
Status Inference	5.053	.715	4.779	.779	-2.217	.028

Perceived Altruism

The mediation analysis showed that perceived altruism mediated the effect of cause

related products consumption on status inference. Using methods prescribed by Hayes(2013, model 4), I tested the significance of the mediator by 5000 bootstrapped samples. As a result of analysis using Model 4, both the regression model of the path from cause related products consumption to perceived altruism ($F=14.327$, $p< .001$) and the regression model of the pathway from cause related products consumption and perceived altruism to status inference ($F=13.515$, $p < .001$) were statistically significant. In addition, as a result of the significance test of the effect of cause related products consumption on the perceived altruism, the perceived altruism increased when cause related products were consumed ($B= .642$, $t(146)=3.785$, $p=.000$). In terms of the effect on status inference when cause related products consumption and perceived altruism are simultaneously inputted, cause related products consumption was found to have an insignificant effect on status inference ($B= .078$, $t(146)=.002$, $p > .1$), while the perceived altruism was found to have a significant effect on status inference ($B = .305$, $t(146) = 5.512$, $p= .000$). I also found that perceived altruism mediates the effect of cause-related products consumption on status inference (total effect= .274, 95% CI[.030, .518]; direct effect=.078, 95% CI[-.155, .312]; indirect effect=.196, 95% CI[.083, .336]). Therefore, the mediating effect of perceived altruism was verified.

[*Table 3*] Mediation Analysis

Outcome Variable: Perceived Altruism						
	B	S.E.	t	p	LLCI	ULCI
Constant	4.465	.122	36.735	.000	4.225	4.705
Cause-related products consumption	.642	.170	3.785	.000	.307	.977
F=14.327(p<.001),R-squared = .091 a. Independent Variable: Cause-related products consumption, Dependent Variable: Perceived Altruism						

Outcome Variable: Status Inference						
	B	S.E.	t	p	LLCI	ULCI
Constant	3.417	.260	13.145	.000	2.903	3.931
Cause-related products consumption	.078	.118	.662	.509	-.155	.312
Perceived Altruism	.305	.055	5.512	.000	.196	.415
F=13.151(p<.001),R-squared = .203 a. Independent Variable: Cause-related products consumption, Perceived Altruism ; Dependent Variable: Status Inference						

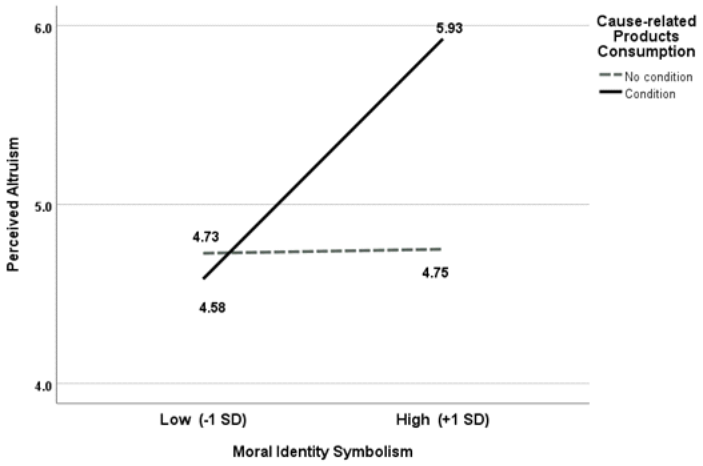
Total effect of X on Y					
Effect	S.E.	t	p	LLCI	ULCI
.274	.124	2.22	.028	.030	.518
Direct effect of X on Y					
Effect	S.E.	t	p	LLCI	ULCI
.078	.118	.662	.509	-.155	.312
Indirect effect(s) of X on Y					
	Effect	Boot SE	Boot LLCI	Boot ULCI	
Perceived Altruism	.196	.065	.083	.336	

Moral identity

Moderation analysis

The SPSS PROCESS macro model 1 (Hayes, 2013) was employed to examine whether moral identity symbolism moderates the impact of cause-related products on perceived altruism. The analysis confirmed this moderation effect using SPSS PROCESS macro model 1 (Hayes, 2013). Moral identity symbolization was identified as a significant moderator of the effect of cause-related products consumption on perceived altruism (B=1.32, t(146)=2.028, p=.049). The conditional indirect effect was most pronounced and statistically significant among individuals high in moral identity symbolization (1 SD above the mean of moral identity symbolization; B=1.176, t(146)=2.416, p=.019). However, the conditional indirect effect was weakest and not statistically significant among individuals low in moral identity symbolism (1 SD below the mean of moral identity symbolization; B=-.144, t(146)=-.333, p>.1).

[*Figure 3*]



[*Table 4*]

Moderated mediation analysis

Outcome Variable: Perceived altruism					
	B	SE	t	95%	
				LLCI	ULCI
Constant	4.7045	.7379	6.3753***	3.2173	6.1918
Cause-related products consumption	-1.4638	.9922	-1.4753	-3.4635	.5359
Moral identity symbolization	.0227	.4607	.0493	-.9058	.9513
Interaction	1.3199	.6510	2.0275***	.0079	2.6319
Outcome Variable: Status Inference					
	B	SE	t	95%	
				LLCI	ULCI
Constant	4.5373	.5394	8.4111***	3.4508	5.6238
Cause-related products consumption	-.2496	.2506	-.9957	-.7544	.2553
Perceived altruism	.3300	.1074	3.0739***	.1138	.5463
*p<0.5, **p<0.01, ***p<0.001					

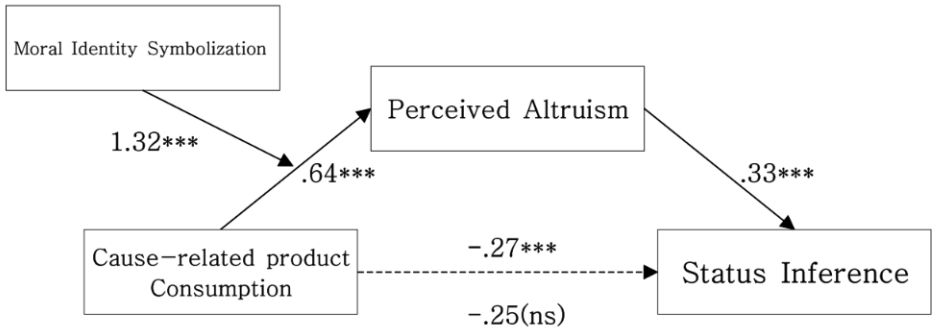
Conditional indirect effects of X on Y					
		B	SE	95%	
				LLCI	ULCI
Moral identity symbolization	low	-.1439	.4223	-1.0152	.7273
	high	1.1759	.4867	.1950	2.1568

Index of moderated mediation				
Moral identity symbolization	B	SE	LLCI	UCLI
	.3756	.2082	.25	.8065

Discussion

Experiment 2 aimed to illustrate the influence of cause-related product consumption on status inference, mediated by perceived altruism, and to investigate variations in this effect based on moral identity symbolism. As predicted, participants in the cause-related products consumption condition inferred a higher status compared to those in the general products condition (H1). Cause-related product consumption, when observed, led participants to associate it with high consumer altruism, resulting in an elevated status inference. In contrast, participants in the general product consumption condition did not exhibit a significant effect on status inference through perceived altruism (H2). Furthermore, individuals with higher moral identity symbolism demonstrated increased perceived altruism and higher status inference in the case of cause-related products consumption. Conversely, participants with low moral identity symbolism recognized altruism and inferred status regardless of the product, but the difference by product was not statistically significant (H3). Consequently, all three hypotheses found support in this experiment.

[*Figure 4*]



General Discussion

People typically assess an individual's social status based on their consumption choices such as clothing, cars, and homes. This study explores how cause-related products consumption is interpreted by others in the context of status inference. It establishes that cause-related products consumption is perceived as a form of prosocial behavior, acting as a signal for status inference by others. In other words, the study demonstrates that engaging in cause-related consumption behavior leads to the attribution of higher status by observers. The underlying mechanism for this relationship is perceived altruism, revealing that when others perceive cause-related products consumption as a costly signal of altruism, the inference of higher status is heightened. Furthermore, the study uncovers variations in conspicuous consumption patterns, showing that individuals, particularly those with high moral identity symbolism, strengthen the perceived altruism associated with cause-related products consumption, leading to an increased inference of high status. Conversely, individuals with low moral identity symbolism exhibit no significant effect on perceived altruism by product and do not influence status inference.

Our theoretical framework and findings enrich our comprehension of how individuals attain status through prosocial behavior. This research contributes to the literature in several ways. Firstly, it addresses the acquisition of social status through prosocial behavior, a topic not extensively explored in the marketing domain. Secondly, it sheds light on cause-related products as a means of signaling status for conspicuous desires, expanding beyond the traditional focus on luxury goods. Thirdly, the study suggests the importance of considering socio-psychological status in marketing research, highlighting how prosocial behavior influences status inference by signaling economic and temporal considerations for others, thereby establishing social psychological superiority. Lastly, by focusing on cause-related products consumption, this study extends beyond the usual direct methods of prosocial behavior, such as financial donations or charity participation.

Implications and Future research

Consumers engage in product consumption as a means of expressing their identity, seeking self-verification. They aim to align both their internal self-concept and external

presentation with the nature of the groups they aspire to belong to. While previous studies on cause-related products mainly focused on purchases driven by the desire to embody high moral values, reflecting the internal aspect of an individual's moral identity, this study demonstrates that consumers also acquire cause-related products to project an image of themselves to others, elevating their perceived status. Notably, the inference of status is made from the perspective of others, distinguishing it from consumers who simply seek to symbolize their status.

Throughout the study, it was anticipated that societal culture would influence the evaluation of altruistic behavior in relation to social status. Specifically, in European society, where the upper class often engages in prosocial activities as part of noblesse oblige, individuals exhibiting prosocial behaviors were expected to be perceived as having relatively high status. Despite limited previous research on noblesse oblige, the moderation effect was tested using power distance belief as a representation of cultural differences in beliefs, yielding non-significant results. Developing a scale for noblesse oblige belief due to the absence of previous scales, both experiments revealed a significant negative moderated parameter (B=-.123, CI [-.207, -.39]). While the results lack a clear explanation given the scarcity of prior studies, it could be inferred that individuals expecting social responsibility from leaders may believe that authentic social leaders refrain from showcasing donations or prosocial behaviors. Despite the negative moderated mediating effect, the significance of the result opens avenues for future research to explore causative variables and provide deeper insights into this phenomenon.

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